



High school teams compete in first-ever New Mexico Governor's STEM Challenge

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"We literally got our hands dirty with our project," says Savannah Palmer, a student at Monte Del Sol Charter School in Santa Fe. "It was a lot of fun, and more practical than the regular classroom work."

Palmer was one of the 600 people who gathered at Los Lunas High School Dec. 7, for the first-ever New Mexico Governor's STEM Challenge, a competition testing students' ability to use science, technology, engineering, and math to solve real-world problems.

Her team, which grew sustainable lettuce for the school kitchen using a combination of hydroponics and aquaponics was one of the 20 showcase award winners at the event. Led by the Office of the Governor, the Challenge is a collaboration with the Department of Public Education, the Department of Workforce Solutions, Los Alamos National Laboratory, and 18 other STEM employers in the state.

The team from Monte del Sol Charter School, with Savannah Palmer in the center.

Sixty-six student teams from public, private, and charter high schools across the state took part in the Challenge, with 46 choosing to participate in the final showcase, along with judges from 19 New Mexico STEM employers, plus teachers, volunteers, and government officials. Each team was composed of up to 10 students who made a computer simulation or prototype answering the question posed by Los Alamos National Laboratory, "How can you use science and technology to make the world safer?"

"New Mexico has absolutely unlimited potential," says Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham. "And this competition is an incredible display of the ingenuity and passion of so many bright, talented New Mexicans. I'm thrilled and inspired by the work of these students and grateful for their effort. It's a reminder to all: New Mexico's best and brightest are on the cutting edge of the science and technology advancements that will define our shared future."

Though this is the first year for the Governor's STEM Challenge, participation was triple that of initial projections.

The teams displayed their prototypes for the judges from STEM employers, with the employers also providing cash awards which saw each student on a winning team take home \$500. The New Mexico Activities Association also awarded participants a varsity letter.

Los Alamos National Laboratory presented two awards, to Taos High School, and V. Sue Cleveland High School in Rio Rancho.

The team from Taos High School, together with the Jacob Miner from Los Alamos National Laboratory (far left), Gwen Warniment (Deputy Secretary at the New Mexico Public Education Department, third from left), Nan Sauer from Los Alamos National Laboratory (fifth from left), and Lt. Gov. Howie Morales (third from right).

“The STEM Challenge’s team-based approach of applying science, engineering, and technology to make the world safer is a microcosm of the work we do at the Laboratory every day,” says Thom Mason, director of Los Alamos National Laboratory. “Watching teams made of diverse individuals from across the state keeps me optimistic for the Laboratory’s future workforce.”

The Laboratory provided nine months of coordination support through its Community Partnerships Office, which emphasizes economic development, STEM education, and volunteerism. The LANL Foundation coordinated STEM employer contributions and provided funds for travel and supplies to public-school teams. The Foundation invests in early childhood education, STEM programming, and teacher development.

A full list of winners and the employers that provided judges and awards [is available here](#).

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